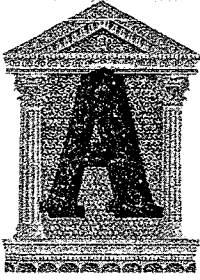


Alexander and the Hellenistic Period 10



Brave and Daring General During Aristotle's lifetime, a king named Alexander rose to great prominence. Some say he was the greatest general who ever lived. He certainly accomplished a great deal during his brief lifetime, and changed the Mediterranean world forever.

Alexander conquered more land than anyone else had ever done. He also collected more wealth than anyone before him. And he ruled more people than any previous king. These are the reasons we call him Alexander the Great.

Alexander had been one of Aristotle's students. His father was Philip II, the king of Macedonia. When Alexander was about 20 years old, his father was assassinated, and Alexander became king. Because he was so young, most people thought that Alexander would be easily removed from the throne by his father's enemies. But Alexander surprised everyone. He crushed those who wanted to get rid of him. Then he began to increase the size of his empire.

Alexander was strong, handsome, and extremely intelligent. But his greatest attribute was his bravery. He was a fearless fighter who never hesitated to put himself in the worst part of the battle. This made his troops very loyal to him. It also made his enemies afraid of him because they were never sure where his daring and courage would lead him.

As a young man, Alexander helped his father conquer Greece. (This was not hard to do because, as usual, the Greek city-states were disorganized). After his father's death, Alexander decided to attack the Greeks' old enemies, the Persians.

In 334 B.C., the Persian Empire was still very large and extended all the way to the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. It took up modern-day Iran, Afghanistan, Turkey, the Middle East, and Egypt.

At the time, Alexander didn't have much to work with. He had a small army of about 30,000 infantrymen and another 5,000 men on horseback. He had no navy. But Alexander didn't care. His plan was to gain a couple of quick and easy victories so that he would have supplies on hand. Then, people would want to follow him because he was brave and strong.

Alexander and the Persian Empire

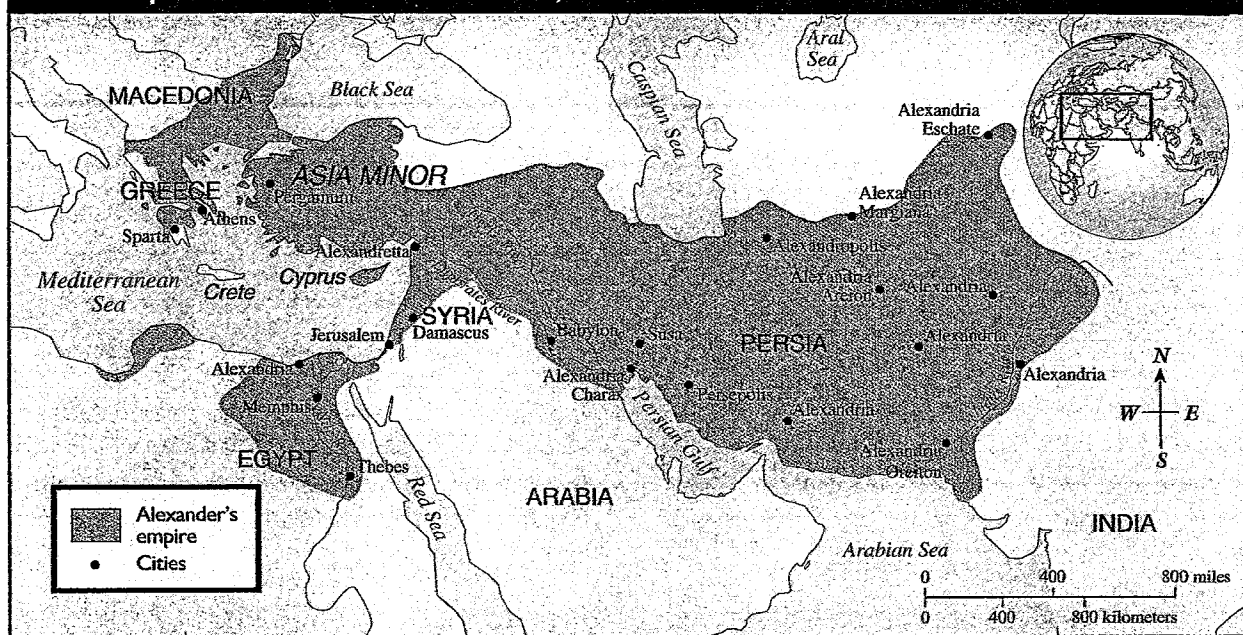
Alexander and his army attacked Asia Minor and conquered it. He faced the Persian emperor Darius III in a battle and was so fierce that the emperor and the Persian army broke ranks and fled. This enabled Alexander to march south, seizing towns along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. He conquered the Middle East, including the city of Jerusalem. He took over everything between Asia Minor and Egypt.

The Persian emperor asked Alexander for peace. He promised Alexander that he would not attack his army if Alexander let him



Known for his strength, his courage, and his delight in battle, Alexander is often classed with the heroes of Greek legend.

The Empire of Alexander the Great, about 300 B.C.



It took Alexander only 11 years to establish his empire. He gave the name "Alexandria" to several of the cities that he founded.

keep the other half of his empire. Since Alexander had never lost a battle yet, he saw no reason to accept the offer that Darius III made. Alexander wanted all of the Persian Empire.

Meanwhile, the nobles of the Persian Empire were not happy with Darius III. They thought he was a weak emperor and a coward. They decided to arrest Darius and take on Alexander by themselves. Once they had arrested the emperor, however, they soon found out that Alexander was coming after them. The nobles murdered Darius III and prepared to fight Alexander.

Although Alexander was brave, the Persian nobles were also brave and strong. They forced Alexander to fight them for three years. He had to fight from mountain stronghold to mountain stronghold in the eastern part of the Persian Empire. Every time he captured one fortress, there would be another one waiting for him. And as he moved east, the nobles gathered their troops to attack him from behind. In the end, however, Alexander won. He had conquered the Persian Empire, the largest and most powerful empire of its time.

Conqueror of the World

Although Alexander had already created an immense empire, he did not stop. He led his army still farther east toward India. By 326 B.C., he and his army were trying to conquer the western part of India. After winning one especially difficult battle, Alexander's army decided they had had enough. They did not want to fight anymore. Partly they were tired of years and years of war, but they also knew that the enemy army was far stronger than they were. They had won one battle, but they knew they had not yet faced the largest part of the enemy army.

In ancient times, one of the weapons used in war was the attack elephant. Elephants were used in battle to charge against the enemy and trample soldiers. The Indian army that Alexander and his men had successfully faced had used 200 of these trained elephants in the battle. But Alexander and his men knew that the Indian army had 5,000 more elephants that they would have to defeat. Eventually, soldiers would learn how to sidestep a charging elephant and then kill it or at least cripple it. But at this point in time, Alexander's men simply wanted to go home.

Having conquered what was then virtually all of the known world, in 327 B.C., Alexander returned home. Since he was strong and capable, the people of his empire probably expected that he would be their ruler for many years to come.

In 324 B.C., Alexander went to Babylon, a major city in Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq) and the capital of his empire. He began to make plans for new projects, including establishing new cities. Unfortunately, it was not to be. In 323 B.C., Alexander caught a fever. Not long after, he died. He was only 33 years old.

Alexander was among the most brilliant and bravest military leaders the world has ever known. He never lost a battle and never gave up. Because of Alexander, the people who lived around the Mediterranean Sea came into contact with Greek culture. As a result, their ideas and knowledge changed forever.

Tales About Alexander

Whenever history produces a larger-than-life character, tales about that person spring up. Alexander the Great was no exception. Tall tales were repeated about him throughout the centuries. It was said that once when he wanted to cross the sea, the waves parted before him, showing the respect that even nature had for this extraordinary man.

Another tale concerned the Gordian knot. According to legend, Gordius, a king in Asia

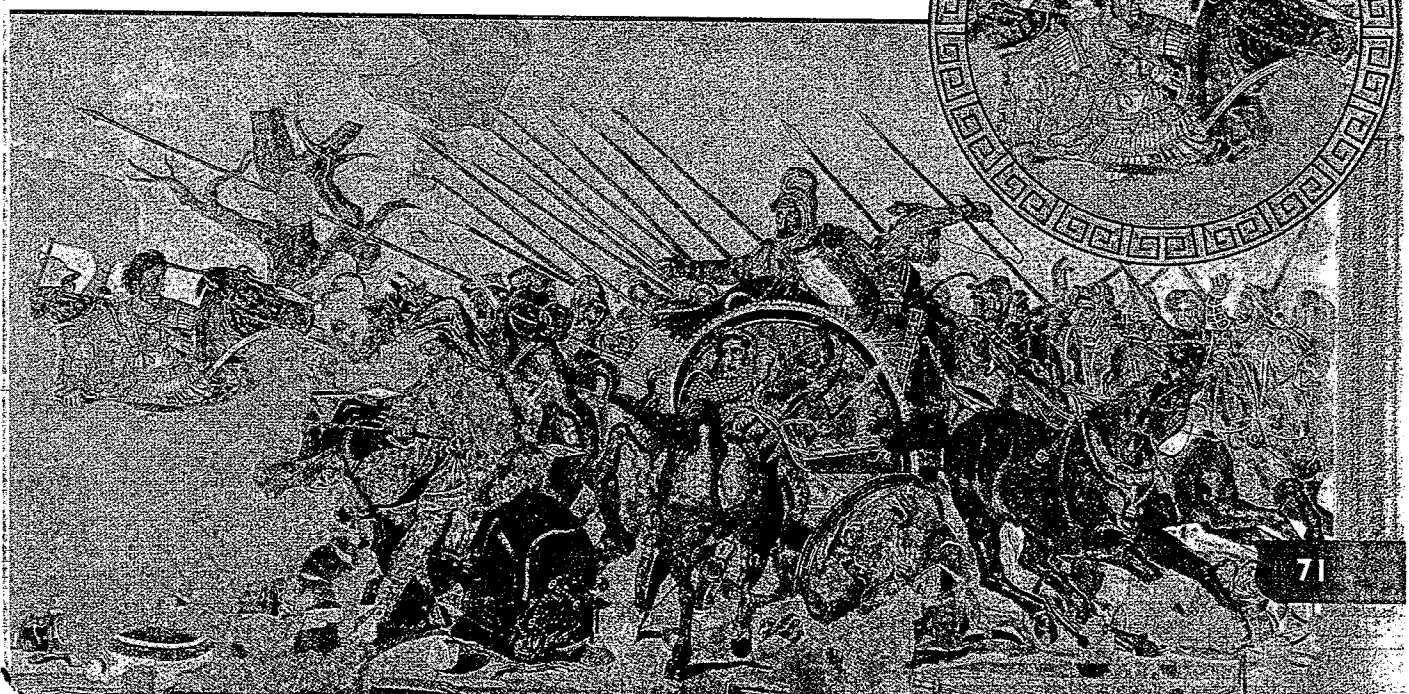
Minor, had tied a large complicated knot in a rope connected to a wagon he had dedicated to the god Zeus. It was said that the knot could only be undone by the man who was destined to rule Asia. Anyone who attempted to untie the knot and failed would be put to death. When Alexander the Great saw the knot, he took out his sword, and with a single blow, cut it apart. Thus, Alexander the Great proved he was worthy to rule all of Asia. Today, the phrase "cutting the Gordian knot" is used when someone finds an unusual solution to a difficult problem.

The Hellenistic Period

Alexander the Great had a short life, but what he accomplished had a long-lasting impact. In the years after his death, Greek, or Hellenic, culture spread to many of the lands he had conquered. Because Greek culture was so important to so many people during these years, the period from the death of Alexander in 323 B.C. to 30 B.C. is often known as the Hellenistic Period.

When Alexander died so unexpectedly, he left neither an heir nor directions as to how the empire he had built was to be governed. On his deathbed he was asked to name his successor. But the weakened Alexander only muttered that the kingdom should be given "to the strongest." He didn't, or couldn't, specify who this might be.

This mosaic, found in the ancient Roman city of Pompeii, shows Alexander (enlarged at right) fighting against the Persians.



The empire was eventually divided among five of his Greek generals. These generals fought among themselves to determine who was "the strongest." This led to much confusion and disorder, but the generals also spread Greek culture wherever they went.

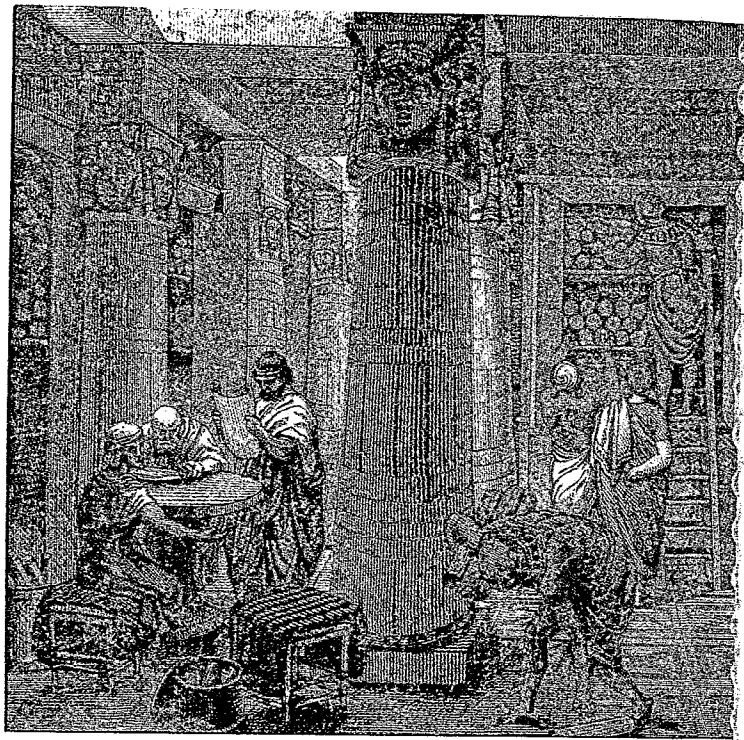
Alexander had believed in the Greek system of education and wanted it established throughout his empire. He had planned to build new cities and improve old ones. He wanted the people throughout his empire to have new public buildings, theaters, and gymnasiums, like those in Athens and other Greek cities. His generals agreed with and carried out many of his plans as far as they were able. Soon, Greek soldiers, philosophers, artists, and poets were in demand throughout the Mediterranean world.

During the Hellenistic Period, kings made coins that looked like Greek coins. Educators imitated the Greek style of education. Philosophers pored over the works of Plato and Aristotle. Artists copied Greek statues, and architects built buildings in the Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian styles. In cities throughout the Middle East and Asia Minor, learning and science flourished.

Alexandria

One of the major cities of the Hellenistic Period was Alexandria, in Egypt. Although Alexandria was located in Egypt, it was a model Greek town. Its government was run by Greeks in the Greek style. The city was planned and built to be like a Greek city and included gymnasiums where its male citizens could exercise and carry on conversations. Alexandria also contained important schools where philosophers could work and deepen their knowledge. It would be an important center of learning and Greek culture for nearly a thousand years.

When King Ptolemy (TAHL uh mee) ruled Alexandria, he began a library there that would be envied by people throughout the Mediterranean world. It is said that he collected 200,000 scrolls.



The library of Alexandria held almost a million scrolls and housed a museum.

(Since there were no machines to print books, people wrote on sheets of papyrus, a kind of paper, and rolled the sheets up into scrolls.). When Ptolemy's son became the ruler of Alexandria, he continued to collect works of knowledge. By the first century B.C., the main library at Alexandria had more than 700,000 scrolls and was still growing. There was no other library like it in the ancient world.

For centuries the library at Alexandria was a center of learning. Some very important thinkers of the ancient world used the library for their research. The astronomer Ptolemy worked there. His theory of how the planets, the sun, and the stars all revolve around the earth was accepted throughout western civilization until the sixteenth century. Unfortunately, the library of Alexandria no longer exists. It was destroyed by a series of robberies, fires, and foreign invasions.

The Hellenistic Period was a great flowering of Greek culture. But even as Hellenistic culture was flourishing throughout the Mediterranean, another great civilization was growing on the Italian peninsula.